

Naturalist notebook

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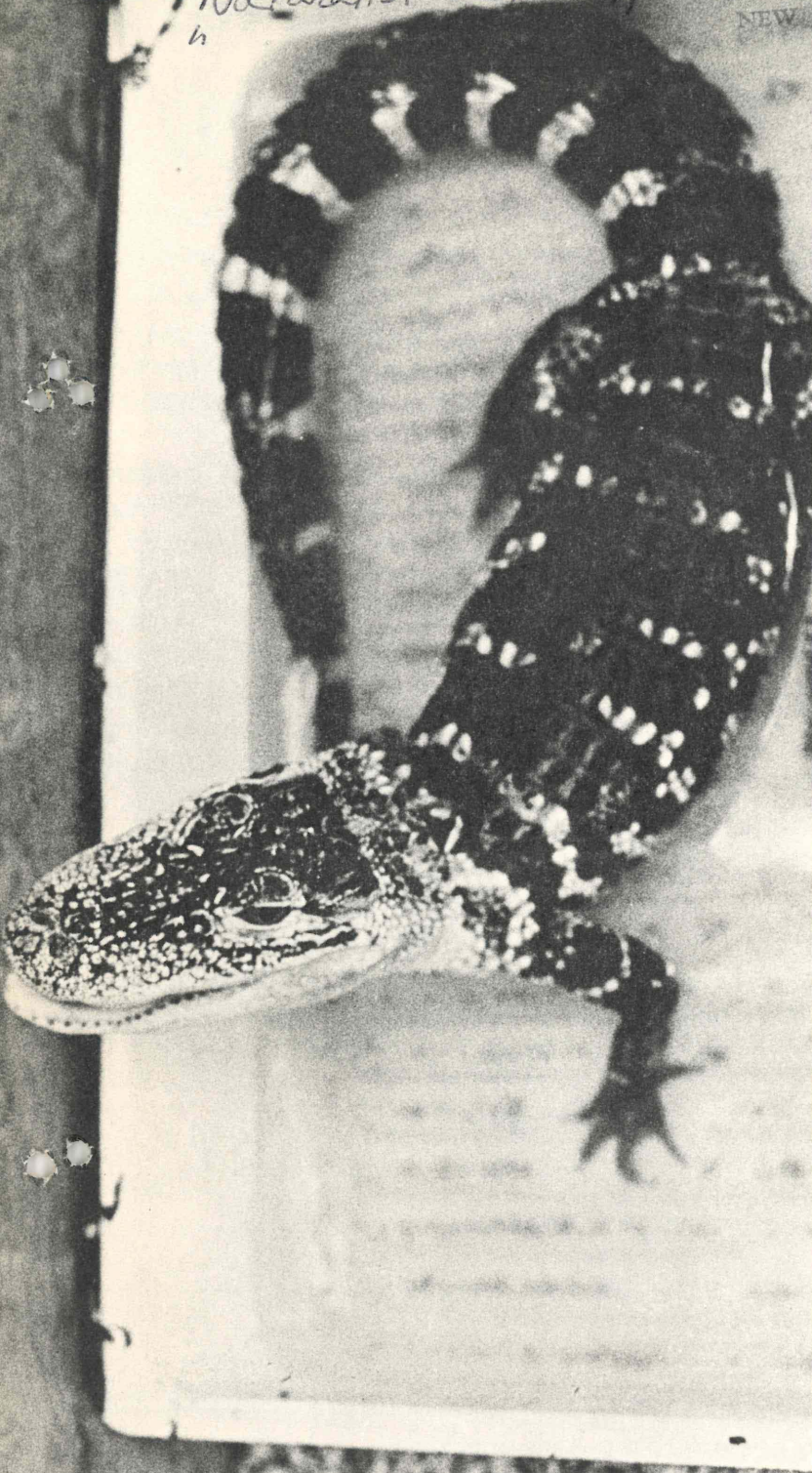
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**OCT.  
1969**





# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

OCTOBER 1969

VOLUME V

NO. 10

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Prepares to Leave  
the TSC (see pg. 7)

Photo by J. Walker

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Sunset—Photo by  
J. Walker

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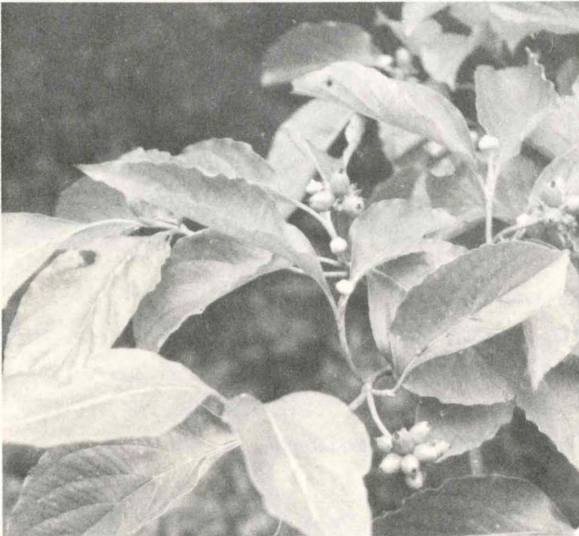


# OCTOBER

## *The Month Of Berries*

October is the month of berries. Many of our shrubs and trees produce berries that are available in the Fall. These coincide with the arrival of birds migrating down from the North. As cold temperatures reduce the number of insects, the birds which are insect eaters such as swallows, thrushes, and warblers, turn to the berries as a food supply. When they arrive, they find that there are many to choose from.

Flowering dogwood berries are one of the favorites. There are over 90 species of birds that will eat them. In wet areas, the winterberry or black alder stands out with its clusters of bright red berries. These are a real favorite with robins. Other red berries that are available at this time include barberry, spicebush, holly, and several species of sumacs.



Flowery Dogwood

Photo by R. Dewire



HOLLY

Not all of the popularly eaten berries are red in color. The grayish berries of the bayberry are a favorite with tree swallows. Flocks of a thousand or more of these migrating birds will descend in a field of bayberries to feed.



POISON IVY

The white berry of the poison ivy is a popular bird food. Unlike many of us who would be very sorry if we were to eat one, birds can eat them all they want and not be affected by the poison.

When you find a tree full of berries this Fall, watch and see how many species of birds will come and feed on it.



# OCTOBER'S NATURE CALENDAR

October is the month of Fall colors and active feeding stations.

Oct. 1 ... Our second smallest bird-the Golden-crowned Kinglet-can be found in woodlands.

Oct. 5 ... Canada Geese are migrating in large "V" flocks.

Oct. 6 ... Evening Grosbeaks were first reported last year - perhaps another invasion this year???

Oct. 7-15 ... The best week to see the Fall foliage.

Oct. 8 ... A good time to watch the coastline for rare migrant shorebirds.

Oct. 14 ... Witch Hazel, one of our last plants to flower, is in bloom.

Oct. 19 ... Horned Grebes arrive-what will this year's population be after last winter's oil disaster?

Oct. 20 ... The little Bufflehead duck arrives in our rivers and coves.

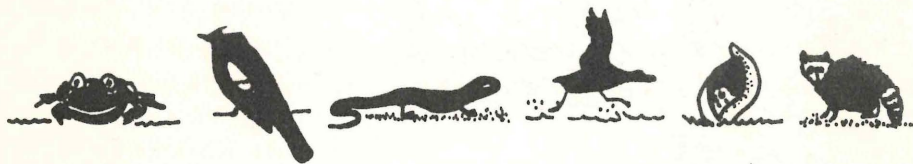
Oct. 25 ... The Hunter's Full Moon.

Oct. 25 ... Daylight Savings Time ends. Be sure to set your clocks back one hour before going to bed.

Oct. 26 ... Our largest sparrow-the Fox Sparrow-comes to feeding stations.

Oct. 27 ... New feeder birds continue to arrive-this day brings the Tree Sparrow.

Oct. 29 ... Pine Siskens arrive from the North for the Winter.



# FOOTNOTES TO NATURE

by MARY JEAN DEWIRE

With the Fall season here, many animals that do not hibernate are busy gathering a supply of food to last them during the long cold winter. One such animal is the gray squirrel whom you can see scurrying through the woods collecting acorns, beechnuts, and hickory nuts.



Contrary to what most people believe, the squirrel does not store his nuts in one place but buries them here and there a few inches under the ground. It has been estimated that a hard-working squirrel will bury 5 nuts every  $3\frac{1}{2}$  minutes and will keep on doing this every morning during September, October, and November until he has stored some 10,000 nuts!

How does the squirrel ever find his buried nuts? Most naturalists agree that it is his superior sense of smell that enables him to find them. In fact, one squirrel was seen digging straight down through two feet of snow to a supply of nuts. Once he finds his nuts, the squirrel shells them quickly using 2 pairs of long curving incisors which grow continuously and must be sharpened by daily use to remain at normal length.

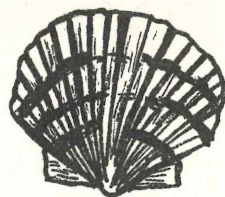


The squirrel never need to worry about going hungry. If he runs out of nuts to find, there are always plenty of bird feeders he can raid where we've all seen him stuffing his cheeks!



# ALONG THE SHORE

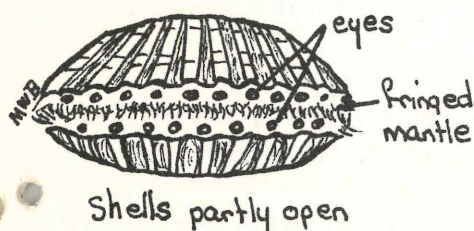
by BARBARA KASHANSKI



## The Scallop

This time of year never passes without reminding me of the scallop, the Atlantic Bay Scallop to be exact. September and October used to be the time when hundreds of boats of all sizes, shapes, and colors would descend on the Niantic River to harvest this beautiful and delicious bivalve. Unfortunately eelgrass, starfish, and man's pollution, which decreases the amount of oxygen in the water, has all but eliminated the once abundant scallop beds of Niantic River Bay - I hope not forever.

The way the scallop gets about is very modern - it is jet-propelled. As the scallop opens its shells the water enters the center cavity; then by quickly shutting the shells the water is rapidly forced out behind thus shooting the scallop forward. Most bivalves, like the clams, have two abductor muscles that open and close the shells but the scallop has only one, and this is unusually large. It is this large muscle that you eat when you buy 'scallops' - not the whole animal.



Perhaps the prettiest part of a live scallop, besides its shell, are the rows of lovely blue eyes that are found on the two borders of the fringed mantle best seen when the shell is partly open.

There may be as many as 50 of these beautiful eyes which are dots of iridescent green surrounded by rings of turquoise blue. They are real eyes! Not very good ones but good enough to tell the scallop danger is near and when to close its shell.

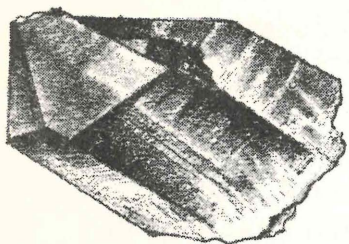
# ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

We've looked at mineral identification, rock identification, and field trips. The following articles are concerned with individual minerals.

## QUARTZ

Quartz is a very common mineral composed of silicon and oxygen. White rounded quartz pebbles can be found on almost any beach in this area. Quartz does, however, occur in other beautiful colors as well. Purple quartz is known as amethyst, yellow quartz as citrine, and black quartz as "smoky topaz". All three of these are cut as semi-precious gemstones.



SMOKY TOPAZ

Quartz crystals have six naturally formed sides coming to a point at one or two ends. This mineral is hard enough to scratch glass and is number seven on the hardness scale. Because of the hardness and durability, most of the beach sand is composed of quartz grains; other minerals wear down much faster.

Very fine-grained quartz is known as agate. Agate is often banded or colored in many beautiful patterns. Agates will be covered in a separate article.

Sometimes quartz crystals can be found with agate in geodes. An agate outside will often contain a center of quartz crystals.



# CLYDE'S RELEASE

*Text by Michael Walker    Photos by Joan Walker*

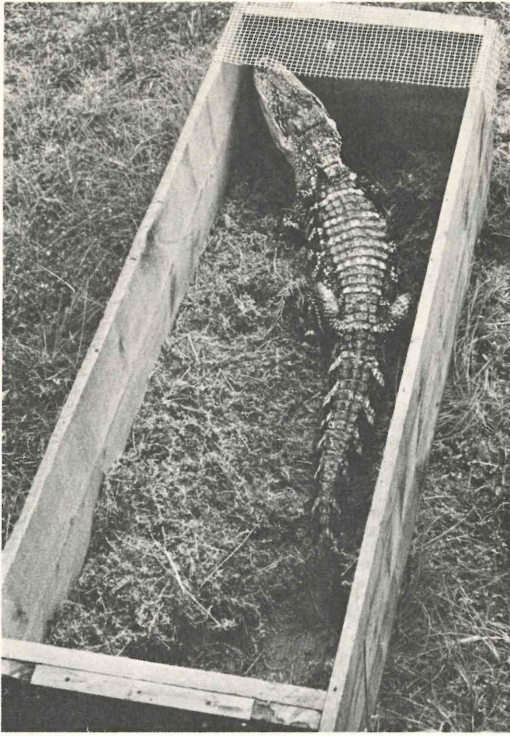
Four or five years ago, the Science Center was given a baby American alligator by someone who had become disillusioned with it as a pet.

The alligator, named Clyde, grew slowly since he was kept at room temperature only. During the winters the Science Center's room temperature was decidedly untropical, and Clyde spent the cold months in a state of near dormancy. Nevertheless, his diet was good (mostly beef heart and fish) and his constitution rugged, and Clyde abided. He seemed to be rather good natured, and he would grunt resonantly at people who passed by his cage.

I arrived last September and ended the days of tranquility. We installed a heating coil under the gravel and water pan of his cage which brought the temperature up to a constant 80°-85°, and Dr. Jekyll changed to Mr. Hyde. Clyde became an aggressive, voracious, hissing creature who would lunge at everyone who passed by his cage. It was not unusual for us to be working in the back room and become aware that someone had entered the museum by their shriek of fright as they passed Clyde's cage and he jumped to the attack.

By early summer, Clyde's appetite had more than tripled and he was three feet long and growing. Since he had outgrown his cage and was not an appropriate animal for display in our new museum, we decided to release him somewhere in alligator country.

Alligators are rather primitive creatures who have remained essentially structurally unchanged for many millions of years. The young are not taught any skills of hunting or defense as are the young of many of the so-called higher animals, and so we felt reasonably sure that Clyde could cope with his native habitat.



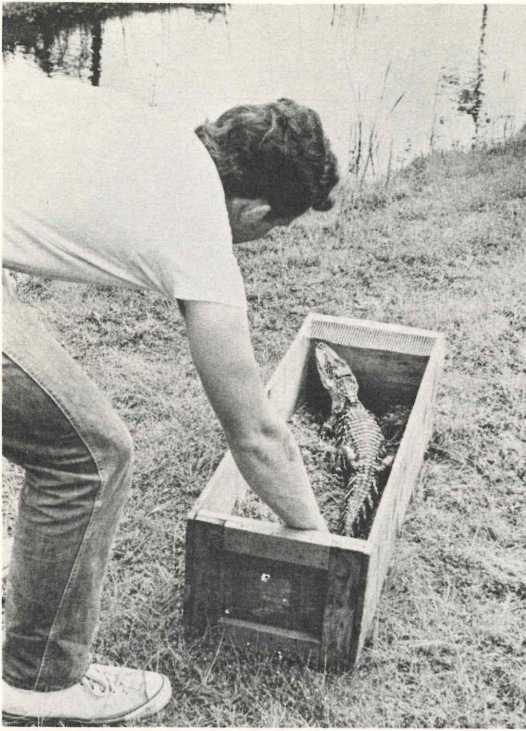
"Clyde's  
Coffin"



The  
Moment  
Arrives



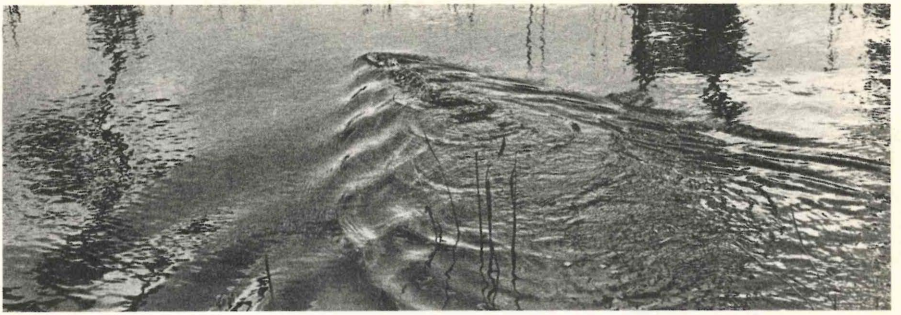




Clyde Is  
Strangely  
Reluctant ...



But Once He  
Spots That  
Water ...



## HE'S AWAY!

Toward the end of August we put Clyde (with surprisingly little difficulty) into a long coffin-like box lined with sphagnum moss to keep him moist. The lid was offset so that he could breathe, and nailed in place.

We had decided to release Clyde in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, near Immokalee, Florida. Corkscrew is a 10,000 acre wilderness wildlife sanctuary owned and administered by the National Audubon Society. It includes the last remaining stand of virgin bald cypress in the United States, and seemed to us to be the best choice for Clyde's release.

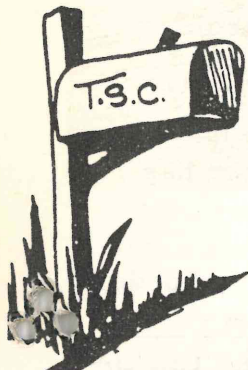
A few days later, when my wife and I arrived at Corkscrew, we introduced ourselves to Bill Owens, the Sanctuary's superintendent, and explained our mission. Mr. Owens said he would be happy to have Clyde join his wild brethren at the Sanctuary and suggested that we release him in a canal near the gatehouse where the Owens would probably be able to observe him for a while as he adjusted to new surroundings.

We took Clyde's box out of our car, walked down the bank of the canal a few hundred yards and set it down. I took the lid off while Joan prepared to take the last photographs of Clyde.

Then we lifted him out and gave him the only thing of any real value man has to offer a wild animal - his freedom.



# ARTICLES OF ADULT INTEREST



We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . .

Photo by R. Dewire



**NEW BUILDING:** On Friday, September 12th at 11:00 A.M. the President of the Science Center, Dr. Russell Sergeant, dug the first shovelful of dirt from the site of our new Interpretive Museum officially beginning construction. Being built by the Torrence Construction Company of Norwich, the completion date is scheduled for early spring.

**FOR ROCKHOUNDS:** For anyone who has even the slightest interest in rocks and minerals, the place to go is the Thames Valley Rockhounds 2nd Annual Gem and Mineral Show. The show will be held on Saturday, October 4th, from 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. at the Second Congregational Church in New London. There

will be many exhibits and demonstrations, identifications, door prizes, and refreshments available. There is a donation of 25 cents asked; children under 16 - 10 cents.

**BIRD FEEDING:** Now is the time to put your feeding station in operation if you haven't already done so. Many potential winter residents at your feeder are moving through on migration now and if you are not feeding they will pass you by. The Science Center has a supply of feed and feeders on hand. There are many styles of feeders available - pole, hanging, shelf, coconut and suet bags. The Center will deliver seed on orders of over 100 lbs. This year's prices are as follows:

		<u>Member</u>	<u>Non-member</u>
Sunflower	50 lbs.	7. 00	7. 75
	3 lbs.	. 70	. 90
Mix	50 lbs.	4. 25	5. 00
	25 lbs.	2. 75	3. 25
	5 lbs.	. 75	1. 00

**THERMAL POLLUTION:** The New London Branch of the American Association of University Women has undertaken a two year study entitled, "Our Beleagured Earth -- Can Man Survive? " On October 9th, Dr. John Rankin, U. of Conn. biology professor and director of the UConn Marine Research Laboratory in Noank, will speak on the thermal effects created by discharge from atomic power plants. The Noank Lab has done a four year study at the Yankee Power Plant in East Haddam for the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration under the U.S. Dept. of the Interior. The public is invited to hear Dr. Rankin speak at 8:30 at Lyman Allyn Museum.

**AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS:** The Science Center's 3rd Season of Audubon Wildlife Films gets underway on Sunday, October 26th, at 3:00 P.M. at Palmer Auditorium at Connecticut College. The fine programs seen this year will begin with Dr. Walter Breckenridge who will present his film "Island Treasure". We hope that as many of our members as possible will be able to attend these worthwhile and memorable films.



# YOUR OWN NATURE JAUNT

by BOB DEWIRE

## The Tidal Zone

When the tide ebbs along many places on our coastline, it exposes numerous rocks and traps many pools of water between them. This area is one in which there is a wide variety of interesting forms of life.

October is a good month to investigate a tidal area at low tide. The water is still quite warm from the hot days of summer so there is much activity.

Having found the dead remains of many animals on the beach as you walk, it is exciting to find these same creatures alive in the water. If there is a small aquarium or even a bucket that you can take, you will be able to closely watch animals move about in the water.

Searching the tidal pools is interesting because you never really know what you may find. Sometimes it is a large starfish caught in one of the pools or maybe an eel. Smaller animals are often as interesting as these larger ones. Take a rock with some barnacles on it and submerge it in the water in your container. Watch closely and you will see the fan-like tentacles of the living barnacle reach out in the water to catch bits of plankton.

Careful searching on the rocks still covered with water in the pools may result in the discovery of what looks like a small flower. Upon taking the rock from the water, the "flower" has become a shapeless, jelly-

like blob. After putting it in your container for a short while, it "blooms" again. You have found a small sea anenome. While not as spectacular as the large ones found elsewhere, these are still most interesting creatures to watch.

Periwinkles or snails usually abound on the rocks as do green and rock crabs underneath them. The large moon snail is occasionally found as is the channel whelk. Other living shells that may be present are blue mussels and slipper shells.

Shorebirds will be seen clambering over the rocks looking for insects and small crustaceans that might be hidden in the seaweed. These birds include the strikingly colored Ruddy Turnstone, the Semipalmated or Ringed Plover with a black ring around its neck, and the very light colored Sanderling which may descend on the tidal zone in flocks of one hundred or more.

If you would like to visit a tidal zone area, two of the most interesting ones locally are at Harkness Memorial State Park and Napatree Point in Rhode Island.



Photo by R. Dewire



# FIELD NOTES

August 15 - September 15

Waterford and New London: The fall migration well underway during this period. NIGHTHAWKS were reported migrating through from August 23rd on. A YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT was at Magonk Point on the 27th and a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE at Harkness on the same date. Huge flocks of COMMON TERNS - 500 or more were at the point at Harkness Park and were joined by a BLACK TERN on the 17th. Warblers were moving through the Arboretum on September 11th. Included in the flocks were BAY-BREAST, BLACK-THROATED GREEN, PRAIRIE, MAGNOLIA, RED-STARTS, and BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLERS. A SCREECH OWL called many evenings during August in Oswegatchie. RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES have been reported in several areas indicating a possible flight similar to last Fall.

Groton, Mystic, Stonington: Barn Island is by far the most productive area to visit in Southeastern Connecticut during this period. All of the following reports are from there. The usually secretive RAILS made themselves visible during this period with a KING and two SORA present on September 1st and a VIRGINIA there on the 6th. A WHIMBREL was there on the 1st as was a very early BALDPATE. A RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH was seen on August 23rd. The people who went on the Science Center's Wednesday evening walk on September 10th were treated to the beautiful sight of 7 DEER at close range including two fawns - one still spotted. They also found a BOX TURTLE in the path, flushed a SORA RAIL, saw

a rare WARBLING VIREO, and the spectacular sight of about 1,000 REDWINGS stretching across the sky. On September 14th, a single day's trip yielded an AMERICAN BITTERN, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, COMMON SNIPE, and an early SLATE-COLORED JUNCO. At the Peace Sanctuary, TREE SWALLOWS migrating down the river early on the morning of September 13th produced a count of 1,000 birds in 15 minutes.

Rhode Island Shoreline: A MARBLED GODWIT was seen at Napatree Point on September 8th. On the 13th, there were 3 COMMON LOONS, a WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER, and some 400 TREE SWALLOWS. At Galilee, R.I. there were 6 WILLETS on September 6th and 4 more were at Quonochontaug on the 7th. The top bird of the period, however, was a LARK BUNTING - a bird of the Great Plains, that was found at Galilee on September 7th.

Contributors to this and last month's column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Lawrence Brooks, Mrs. Charles Chapin, Mrs. Huntington Chappell, James Clark, Bob and Mary Jean Dewire, John Gardner, Rick Holloway, Bill Morgan, Eloise Saunders, and Mike Walker.

**WE ARE ANXIOUS TO HAVE YOUR REPORTS  
OF NATURE HAPPENINGS FOR THIS SECTION  
OF THE NATURALIST NOTEBOOK - CALL  
443-4295 OR SEND A POSTCARD LISTING A  
NOTED EVENT ....**



# ACTIVITIES FOR OCTOBER

October 4 - 9:00 A.M. Harkness Park. A trip to watch for early migrant waterfowl and late migrant shorebirds. Meet at the Harkness Parking Lot.

October 11 - 10:00 A.M. A Junior Workshop for members in Grades 1, 2, and 3. "Making a Shell Collection". Children will meet in the parking lot at Harkness State Park. Limit 10 children. Registration required.

October 25 - 8:00 A.M. Napatree Point. A trip to observe waterfowl and shorebirds and to beachcomb for various marine animals. Meet at the Watch Hill Parking Lot.

October 26 - 3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film at Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College. Dr. Walter Breckenridge will present his program entitled "Island Treasure". Series and guest tickets will be available at the door.

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# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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ROBERT C. DEWIRE—*Naturalist*  
MICHAEL WALKER—*Curator*

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ROBERT DEWIRE  
*Editor*

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Sunset Over Corkscrew—Clyde's New Home

Photo by J. Walker